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SUBJECT: G8 NGO FORUM OFFERS GOR A CHANCE TO BOOST ITS IMAGE, INDEPENDENT ACTIVISTS A CHANCE TO VOICE THEIR CONCERNS.

Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Kirk Augustine. Reason 1.4
(b, d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. A range of NGOs, including those involved in human rights issues, took part in a March 9-10 G8 NGO forum in Moscow. The plenary sessions and working group meetings featured lively discussions, both on the GOR's G8 agenda items and on concerns about the state of Russia's civil society. The event broke no major new ground, but allowed the GOR to cast itself as open to independent civil society voices while allowing NGOs to underscore their concerns, including about Russia's controversial new NGO law. END SUMMARY.

THE PURPOSE OF THE FORUM

¶2. (C) Approximately three hundred NGOs from thirty countries, along with representatives of international organizations, met March 9-10 in Moscow at a G8 NGO forum. Ella Pamfilova, Chair of the Presidential Council for Assistance to Development of Institutions of Civil Society and Human Rights, served as the coordinator. According to Tatyana Lokshina of the Demos Center for Information, Pamfilova had received a call from the Presidential Administration (PA) a few months earlier instructing her to organize civil society events around the G8 summit. Pamfilova turned to civil society activists, including Yuriy Dzhibladze of the Center for the Development of Democracy and Human Rights and Aleksandr Auzan of the National Project Institute, to help organize the forum. Dzhibladze, a vocal opponent of the NGO legislation whose organization was among those identified with the recent British "spy" scandal, told us that despite his misgivings about working with the GOR, he agreed to assist with the forum since Pamfilova supports independent NGOs and would allow him to work without interference.

¶3. (SBU) After an initial plenary session, the forum broke up into working groups to prepare recommendations for the St. Petersburg G8 summit agenda. The discussions in the workshops we observed were lively and included a wide range of views. Many of the sessions focused on concrete proposals, although some participants complained to us that a number of NGO representatives were focused primarily on making speeches. A few workshops, notably the one on energy security, were unable to reach consensus on policy recommendations during the forum. In addition to addressing the St. Petersburg summit, some NGO representatives also weighed in on the structure and agenda of future G8 summits, suggesting that NGOs be allowed to propose one agenda item at future G8s. The forum included a meeting with all 8 sherpas.

One of our contacts told us the forum organizers hope to schedule a meeting for sherpas with a small group of NGO representatives sometime around May.

¶4. (C) Although the G8 itself was the central focus of attention, NGO participants also discussed GOR attitude toward civil society following the passage of the controversial NGO legislation and the "spy" scandal involving British diplomats. In the opening session Pamfilova said "rumors about the death of civil society in Russia are greatly exaggerated." Some participants expressed concern about the future of Russian civil society once Russia's recently passed NGO legislation goes into effect in April. During the closing plenary session Dzhibladze criticized the NGO legislation and called for international monitoring of its implementation. Pamfilova noted that her office was monitoring the legislation; another participant countered that since the implementing regulations for the legislation were being developed in secret, there was nothing to monitor yet.

WIDE RANGE OF PARTICIPANTS

¶5. (C) The forum was noteworthy for the breadth of organizations represented, ranging from Greenpeace, Soldiers' Mothers, Oxfam, Memorial, and Human Rights Watch to the National Endowment for Democracy, the UN, and Russia's recently-formed Public Chamber. Irina Yurna of the Ford Foundation expressed satisfaction with organizers' selection of Russian invitees. Denise Roza of the NGO Perspektiva, a USG grantee, told us the organizers had allowed her to invite whomever her organization wanted. The GOR paid for tickets and lodging of many participants as well as providing visa support for the international invitees.

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¶6. (C) Nonetheless, there was some grumbling about participation. Nigel Martin, President of the Forum International de Montreal, whose organization claims to have helped organize the first G8 NGO conference in 2002, told us that past NGO G8 fora, though smaller, had included more international representation. Martin, who also served on the Advisory Council for the Moscow event, believed it was dominated by Russian NGOs lacking in experience in multilateral fora. The forum was organized late, meaning that some key international players were not invited or could not attend, Nina Belyayeva of the Higher School of Economics noted to us. By way of example, she said that one of her U.S. contacts who was listed as a member of the forum's Advisory Council never received an invitation and did not attend. Viktoriya Panova of the Moscow Institute of International Relations and an organizer of the forum, said that invitations only began to go out three weeks in advance, making it difficult to get some of the more prominent international groups to attend.

¶7. (C) Some participants complained to us that Russian Government-Oriented Non-Governmental Organizations (GONGOs) had been invited to defend the GOR's reputation. Svetlana Gannushkina of the Civic Assistance Committee and a board member of Memorial told us that GONGOs now participated at most official NGO events in Russia. In the view of Aleksandr Petrov of Human Rights Watch, the presence of GONGOs, along with other problems, raised questions about how much could really be achieved at the forum. He told us that a number of human rights organizations were considering holding a parallel meeting around the St. Petersburg summit to brief the original G7 members on human rights issues in Russia.

COMMENT

¶8. (C) The forum did not break major new ground, but it offered the GOR an opportunity to present itself as open to a

wide range of NGO views. At the same time it gave independent NGOs a chance to weigh in not only on the G8 but on other issues related to civil society. The fact that it was headed by Pamfilova, whom many in the independent NGO community view favorably, added to its credibility, as did the fact that people like Gleb Pavlovskiy, long viewed as a pivotal player in GOR attempts to coopt civil society, did not play a leadership role in the proceedings.

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